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SOME LEADERS OF RECENT RELIGIOUS THINKING¹

It is always easier to find information concerning theological movements in the distant past than in the period in which we are living. Professor Buckham has rendered a very real service to all students of theology by his survey of recent progressive religious thinking in this country. He has assembled information hard to obtain without much research. One would naturally expect that such a survey would bring into the foreground theologians of the conventional type. We are accustomed to thinking of men like Charles Hodge, N. W. Taylor, and Edwards A. Park, as those who shaped the thinking of the generation immediately preceding ours. It is therefore a little surprising to discover that the majority of those named in this volume were pastors rather than professional teachers of theology. The reader is compelled to agree with the author that perhaps the most vital and fruitful influences in modern religious thinking came from this source rather than from scholastic learning.

The men to whom primary attention is given are Bushnell, T. T. Munger, George A. Gordon, Wm. J. Tucker, Washington Gladden, and the two brothers, Egbert and Newman Smyth. No one will question the leadership of these men. It is to be noted, however, that they all come from the Congregational denomination. This raises the question whether perhaps the author has not been influenced somewhat by his own personal relationships in his selection of names. Others might consider that men like William Newton Clarke, Milton S. Terry, and A. V. G. Allen have been quite as influential in modern thinking as have some of those in the above list.

It is interesting to observe that the conscious aim of all these men was to humanize the traditional theology. They used the terminology of that theology and never seriously questioned its fundamental tenets. To be sure, the content was in many instances radically changed under the stress of modern social interests, as with Dr. Gladden, or at the behest of modern idealistic philosophy, as in the case of Dr. Gordon. But with all the modifications which took place, one discovers no fundamental dissatisfaction with the general framework of the traditional theological system. Today we are coming to be keenly conscious that the principles of inductive science and the vogue of psychological analysis create an attitude of mind which does not start complacently with what seemed axiomatic to the men of a generation ago. Pro-

¹ *Progressive Religious Thought in America*. By John Wright Buckham. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1920. xi+352 pages. \$2.00.

fessor Buckham himself appears to feel that the future progress of theology will be in the main continuous with the work of these men. While the next generation of theologians will undoubtedly gain great inspiration from their courage and their human sympathies, they are likely also to be impressed with the fact of certain assumptions which should be more critically investigated.

The book is written partly in the form of biographies and partly in the form of theological interpretation. The great advantage of this presentation is that it permits the creative personalities of these leaders of thought to stand forth, and we thus see the making of theology in the actual life of men instead of having it discussed in terms of the development of ideas. Moreover, while all of these men had to face distrust and sometimes vigorous opposition, yet they continued honored and trusted leaders in the denomination. This is evidently due to the fact that their primary interest was in the promotion of genuine religion rather than in the indifferent discussion of theological questions. The practical conclusion to be drawn is that a liberalism which maintains social sympathy with the religious aims of the church will be permitted actively to make its contribution. It is only a liberalism which becomes indifferent to religious motives which is excluded from a place in the life of the church.

In a sense this book is a contribution to the celebration of the Pilgrim Tercentenary. These leaders of Congregational thought are the spiritual descendants of the Pilgrims. Professor Buckham has rendered a valuable service in furnishing so appreciative an interpretation of the expression of that Pilgrim spirit in the religious life and thinking in the generation immediately behind us.

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THE PROBLEM OF GOD

The life of modern man constantly expands with new interests, new hopes, new powers, and his vital religion, which embodies all of these things, tends ever to flow away from the dogmas of a more restricted past. One by one the ideas of the old Christian creeds have been revitalized or discarded. For this generation God has become a problem, and the task of the apologists is made more difficult through the thrusting of the fact of evil into the agonized consciousness of man during these last few pathetic years. Professor Sorley's book¹ must be counted as

¹ *Moral Values and the Idea of God.* By W. R. Sorley. New York: Putnam, 1919. xix+534 pages. \$5.00.